Harkin: Omnibus Agreement Supports High-Quality Early Learning

"The omnibus includes significant new investments to support early learning initiatives. It will restore cuts from sequestration, which resulted in Iowa Head Start programs having to eliminate services for 800 children and their families last year. Nearly half of the increase in Head Start will be used to expand Early Head Start for kids from before birth through age three; this will mean about 340 additional slots for infants and toddlers across Iowa, a 25 percent increase. The bill increases the Child Care and Development Block Grant, which helps working Iowa families afford quality child care. Finally, the bill also provides $250 million that can be used to help states develop high quality early learning programs for poor and middle-income 4-year-olds. All of these investments improve access to high-quality early learning experiences for children from birth to kindergarten entry, and lay the foundation for my bill – the Strong Start for America's Children Act – which would build on these investments through a new Federal-State partnership in this area." – Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA)

On Thursday, January 16, 2014, the U.S. Senate approved H.R.3547, the omnibus spending package. The package included vital funding for high-quality early learning included by Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), as Chairman of the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittee. This funding corresponds with Harkin's work as chair of the Senate's HELP Committee, where he played a leading role in crafting the *[Strong Start for America's Children Act](#)*.

Among the highlights of Chairman Harkin's efforts to increase resources for high-quality early learning:

Head Start – The bill includes $8.6 billion, a $1.025 billion increase, for Head Start, which will support comprehensive early childhood services for approximately 90,000 additional children and their families, including 40,000 infants and toddlers through Early Head Start. This increase restores cuts from sequestration and on top of that supports an approximately 1.3 percent cost of living adjustment for all current grantees. This will help restore slots lost because of sequestration, allow grantees to retain and recruit highly-qualified staff, and otherwise keep pace with rising costs in order to maintain high-quality services.

The increase for Head Start also includes $500 million to expand Early Head Start, for children and families from before birth through age three, including the establishment of new Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships. Through new Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships, Early Head Start providers will partner with local center and home-based child care programs to improve the quality of those programs to meet Early Head Start standards. This leverages investments through the Child Care and Development Fund, and will further improve the quality of early childhood care and education options for infants and toddlers.

Child Care and Development Block Grant – Includes $2.36 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant, which provides grants to states for child care assistance to working families, and to otherwise improve the quality of child care programs. This is a $154 million increase over the Fiscal Year 2013 level to support child care assistance for an estimated 22,000 additional children and their working families. These are families who are working, or in some cases continuing their education to improve their job prospects, and they depend on quality, affordable child care in order to do so.

Race to the Top – The bill allows $250 million to be used for grants to States to help them develop, enhance or expand high quality preschool programs for 4-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families or for other State early learning activities that improve the quality of such programs.

For more information on Senator Harkin's initiatives, visit http://harkin.senate.gov/, or follow him on Facebook http://www.facebook.com/tomharkin and Twitter https://twitter.com/SenatorHarkin.